

WATTS VILLAGE THEATER COMPANY

by Guillermo Avilés-Rodríguez

THEATER AS A VERB, NOT A NOUN

[Watts Village Theater Company](#) (WVTC) is the only arts organization that regularly produces live theater in the community of Watts. It has established itself in the Los Angeles theater scene through identification of its name and work with the community of Watts, as well as through the artistic excellence and production values of its shows. On the cutting edge of cultural depictions of race relations, socio-political tensions and historical adaptations, WVTC is currently focusing on multiple projects that highlight its core mission: To bring powerful stories to the stage in a new and iconoclastic way. WVTC conceives of itself neither as an “ethnic” nor a “neighborhood” company, but as a professional theater company that speaks to the greater Los Angeles and United States community through themes shaped by the Watts experience. WVTC is first and foremost an arts organization, although it takes pride in its history of addressing



Afro/Latino relations, we are now focusing on projects that will help redefine theater in Los Angeles as something that moves people to action not something they go to; in short we want theater to be a verb, not a noun.

social needs within the community. In keeping with WVTC's mission to produce work that speaks to the experience of all our community residents, past and present, and coming off of a three year cycle of exploring

MEET ME AT THE METRO

Currently WVTC is in the beginning stages of development of our most ambitious project to date: *Meet Me @ the Metro* (M3), an interactive, trans-disciplinary theatrical journey for both incidental and traditional audiences taking place aboard and around the Los



Angeles Metro Rail Transit System. M3 will bring people from geographically distant and diverse communities together to share art in new and unexpected locations as well as build relationships between artists and audiences through the innovation of new work. It is WVTC's two-pronged attempt to explore isolationism in Los Angeles (communal, artistic and demographic).

Unfortunately this isolation is not exclusive to Watts, or other Los Angeles communities; it affects artistic communities as well. Interdisciplinary collaborations between dancers, actors and musicians are rare and often limited to musicals and cabarets. M3 is an effort to break down walls of isolation, both geographic and cultural, and deepen connections between performers of all disciplines. Furthermore, this is our unique attempt to bring live performance to people who would otherwise not be able to see it, and to coax traditional theater-goers out of the theater to places they may not go otherwise.

The site-specific nature of this project provides the added benefit of reaching incidental audience members who will stumble upon the performances during their commute. The first part of M3 will set the tone for the top of the rail journey beginning at Union Station, and the second part will unite the series of performances in the Watts Towers Amphitheater. At present the route of the performance will take an audience from Union Station in the heart of Downtown Los Angeles

through South Los Angeles and into one of the most storied communities in all of America—Watts.

CLOVER & CACTUS

Our 2010-2011 main stage project, currently in the beginning stages of development, is called *Clover & Cactus*. It will be a bilingual (Eng./ Span.) story highlighting a compelling but little known event in U.S. history during which a group of disenfranchised Americans and European immigrants fought for Mexico during the Mexican-American War. This project will offer audiences a fresh historical lens with which to view cross-cultural interactions, taking the Irish/Latino dynamic of the late 1800's and juxtaposing it with interactions in present day America.



Clover & Cactus will enjoy a long-term development process. A playwright, dramaturge and music director will work in consultation with WVTC's Artistic Director over the course of 15 months. Unlike the development process of a traditional musical, the playwright will write in tandem with the musical director, and the artistic team will meet once a month to share ideas and content. Each team will then work in consultation with the artistic director to refine their respective creative content and shape the collection of scenes and musical numbers that will eventually comprise the completed full-length play. WVTC is excited to be collaborating with Scott Rodarte (of the East Los Angeles-based band Ollin) who will be *Clover & Cactus*' composer and musical director.

Clover & Cactus will use the historical events surrounding St. Patrick's battalion (or the battalion of San Patricio) during the Mexican-American War as a point of departure for a full-length play with music. The project will use themes relating to the historic events that took place during the war and the time period—disenfranchisement, cultural relativity

and religious ties, among other things—to discuss issues relevant to present-day Californians, especially residents of Watts, an underserved and disenfranchised community that has undergone seismic cultural shifts within the last several decades, and has historically been plagued by issues of civil unrest, crime and drugs. This project will go a long way toward deconstructing the view of Anglophones as a monolithic group and will highlight the strength of religious and cultural ties across the lines of skin color and national boundaries.



All photos by Watts Village Theater Company: WVTC Takes On Jesús Malverde (cover image); Metro logo- A Moving Theater; Undercover No Longer: Watts Village Becomes Front Page News; 365 Days/Plays Staged Shadow of the Watts Towers.

Watts Village Theater Company receives funding from the California Arts Council's [Creating Public Value Program \(CPV\)](#) for *Meet Me @ the Metro*. The CPV Program supports arts organizations in rural or underserved communities through projects making a positive contribution to the individual and collective lives of all Californians. For more information on CPV contact [Lucero Arellano](#).

